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881 304 *Operation performed on the shore. Preliminary hoax. Novices' wounds washed by their fathers in the sea.*

Any skilled man may perform the operation, an act called *e lohure*. If on any specified occasion there are many such experts, the novices belonging to each Lodge go to their own special places on the beach. If, on the other hand, there are only one or two, all go to the same place. Here each novice in turn is made to stand up against a tree, to which his tutor clasps him while at the same time blindfolding him by means of a money-mat (the same as will later be presented to the operator as his fee) held over his eyes. Then tutor and operator both address him, telling him not to shake or flinch, but to bear the operation bravely.

The operation, called *bagho*, and for which the verb is *baghoi*, is performed by inserting a hardwood stick between the foreskin [1] and the upper side of the glans penis,[2] and cutting on to this with a bamboo knife, the result being that the foreskin, while still attached to the corona, hangs down exposing the glans. The operation is similar to that performed on Atchin and in all the neighbouring islands, and a more detailed description of it, together with the personal reactions of the novices, will appear in my forthcoming work on that island, where I was fortunate enough to witness it. On Vao the bamboo knife is called *tele*, and the hardwood stick inserted into the foreskin *memen ne tele*, "the knife's tongue," a term which, in the opinion of the Atchin folk, is insipid and uninspiring in comparison with their own term "shark's tongue," referring to the swallowing monster.[3]

As soon as the operation is over, the tutor removes the money-mat from the novice's eyes, and drops it on the ground as payment for the operator. As soon as it has been removed and the novice has sufficiently recovered his wits to see, the tutor addresses him, using the kind of symbolical language associated with initiation, and saying "Look down. See, your *ghavigo* ('malay apple') is red."

The novice looks down, and is then made, apparently unaided, to walk down to the sea, where his father now takes charge of him, and, making him sit down at the water's edge, washes his wound in the salt water,[4] his tutor being now free to walk about and watch the operations on the other novices.

881 *Mothers' brothers arrive dancing Na-rel, inspect the novices and are beaten.*

When all the operations are finished, and the novices are ranged in a row at the waterside having their wounds washed, the noise of singing

[1] Called *temben* (or *wul na kalon*, literally "skin of the penis").
[2] Called *wòhin*. Compare *wohoi*, "to plug up a hole" (see p. 467).
[3] See pp. 485-6.
[4] All wounds, of whatever nature, are washed whenever possible in salt water, which is known to have healing properties.

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is heard, and on to the scene bursts a procession consisting of all the mothers' brothers of the novices, together with other male relatives on the mother's side, dancing and singing songs belonging to the *Na-rel* cycle. Arrived at the spot where the novices are sitting, each mother's brother bends down to splash some water over his sister's son's wound, and, as he does so, is beaten by the boy's patrilineal kinsmen. This is the only occasion on which, to my knowledge, mothers' brothers are beaten during the initiation rite on Vao, a great contrast to Atchin procedure, and one giving rise to the term "good initiation" already mentioned [1] by which the Vao rite is known.

Novices eat red yam, symbolic of blood, and are then hoaxed into believing that a triangular piece of foreskin has been removed.

While still having their wounds washed, the novices are given to eat a species of red yam, here called by the special term *ühüngerē*, symbolic of blood. This being only a symbolic act, and the taste of this yam being far from good, each novice takes only a bite of it, and then throws the rest into the sea. This being done, he is then given as much good roast white yam as he cares to eat, but it is not till the fifth day that he is allowed the pleasure of eating puddings.

At the same time, in consonance with the dual attitude on the part of the elders of mental bullying alternating with care, the ground is laid for a hoax practised seven days later, by persuading the novice that the gap in his foreskin caused by the incision has been made by the actual removal of a triangular piece of skin, an imitation of which he will then, to his horror, be expected to eat.[2]

First medicinal treatment.

When the blood from the wound of each individual novice has ceased flowing, he is conducted a little way up the beach to a spot where his tutor administers the first of a series of medicinal treatments. In this treatment the curative element is the juice obtained by heating a species of seaweed called *mēlavü* over a fire.[3] In the application of this each tutor is assisted by another,[4] who places his hand over the glans penis to protect it, while the boy's tutor squeezes the juice over the wound. After this, the wound is gently stroked with leaves of a kind called *na-mbor* similarly heated over a fire and then folded, so as to clean the wound and remove

[1] See p. 500. [2] See p. 518.

[3] It is to be noted that most seaweeds contain iodine and other mineral salts which are both antiseptic and astringent.

[4] In Atchin each tutor, who is addressed by the novice as "husband," has one or more assistants called "lovers," and it is one of these who assists on such occasions, and performs all the more menial duties allocated to the "husband." I do not know whether the same holds of Vao, or whether the assistant in this case is simply another patrilineal relative or the tutor of another novice.

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any clots of blood that may remain.[1] The penis is then wrapped in a dressing of soft leaves of a kind called *ro vile-vile*, over which is then wound the usual boy's penis-wrapper made of the split half of a banana leaf, called *nu-mba-nu-mbe*.[2]

Novices enter initiation house.

After this application, each novice lies down on the beach to await the ceremonial procession into the initiation house.

When all are ready, and have rested a little, all the men of the village join in a procession from the beach inland to the dancing-ground, dancing and singing songs of the *Na-rel* cycle. The tutors dance among the rest, each with his novice beside him. The novices, however, hardly feel like dancing, and walk as best they can, each carrying a club of a kind called *wura*[3] over his left shoulder, while in his right hand he holds a twig cut from the hardwood tree called *tor-tore*, which he moves up and down as if it were an adze. This twig is called by the same name *tele*[4] as the knife with which he was incised, symbolical of the operation he has just suffered.

So the procession, some singing and dancing, while the novices bemusedly wave their mock adzes, makes its way up the path into the dancing-ground. As they enter the ground a single pig is sacrificed and the gongs strike up the rhythm called *na-mbe ne-ôs-ôs*, to the accompaniment of which they process to the further end. Then the singing ceases, and, to the accompaniment of a fresh rhythm, called *na-mbe ril-dralen*, the procession turns, and moves silently in the serpentine course called *gha vire-vire* back over the ground till, finally, they leave it and enter into the special house built for the novices on the high ground behind the Upper Side.

3. THIRTY DAYS' SECLUSION

Must not be seen too close by women.

Here, and in the surrounding enclosure, they remain for thirty days, accomplishing their *rite de passage* into manhood, corresponding to the similar thirty-day period elapsing between physical birth and the child's first presentation to the world.[5] On Atchin, during the corresponding thirty-day period, the novices may not on any account be seen by women.

[1] This treatment also indicates considerable medical knowledge, whether conscious or no, it being generally accepted in European surgery that the presence of a blood clot predisposes both to infection and to the formation of redundant scar tissue.

[2] Informal penis-wrappers made in this way are adopted without ceremony by boys who are about to attain puberty but have not yet been initiated. The word *nu-mba-nu-mbe* is a reduplication of a form of the word *na-mbwes* used on Atchin for the plaited penis-wrapper worn by adults, for which the Vao term is *na-apu*.

[3] Possibly the same as the Atchin *n'ei e ras*.

[4] More usually used for a shell adze.

[5] See p. 179, also the thirty-day period of retreat after the Maki (pp. 394, 402).

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suddenly, in burst the others, disguised with paint to represent the ghosts of old men (*ta-mat mōt*). Those within, feigning terror as great as that with which they wish to inspire the novices, emit frightened cries, shuffle and cower like birds, and, finally, simulating regained courage, line up in front of their now startled and trembling wards, holding long bamboos horizontally before them as a kind of protecting fence, against which the alleged ghosts hurl themselves in their effort to get at the boys. It has already been seen to by the tutors that the novices are well aware of the awful fact that any one of them whom one of the ghosts succeeds in striking will some day be killed in battle. They are, however, powerless to move, being hemmed in between the sloping roof and the line of protecting tutors. Sometimes matters are so arranged that the tutors win, and the ghosts retire in discomfort. Sometimes, however, one of the ghosts will break through and strike a novice, to his dismay. Then the ghostly party utters ghoulish cries: "*Hui! . . . hui! . . . hui! . . .* ?." [1]

Medicinal Treatment by Means of Infusions and Steaming

Administered by the tutors; assisted on the first three days successively by initiates from all villages on the island.

During the ensuing five days the novices' wounds are treated by means of infusions and steaming, the administration of which is a semi-public act affording an opportunity for initiates from all villages on the island to view the progress of the novices. Thus, when the rite of initiation is being performed in Pete-hul, boys' tutors are assisted in the application of the remedies by initiates from this village and from Tolamp; on the second day by initiates from Pete-hul's twin-village, Togh-vanu; and on the third day by initiates from villages on the other Side of the Island in the usual order.[2] On the fourth and fifth days the treatment is continued by the novices' own tutors only.

Mock names for remedies.

In accordance with the mock language used in initiation, these remedies are all called by the name of a bird, *na-wagh*, but the leaves from which they are made are called by the names of fish, thus:

	Name of the Leaf used to make the Infusion	Name of the Fish by which the Leaf and Remedy are called
1st remedy . .	*rōmbi*	*mov-ghat*
2nd remedy . .	*rombon na-nah*	*hulup*
3rd remedy . .	*bor-mbaru*	*dirav*

[1] This form of cry is called *ra hūrēi tōgh-wōwū*. Though no overt mention of homosexual acts was made in this account, the connexion of such with sudden death in battle is clearly seen in the final hoax perpetrated on the 107th Day (see p. 519).

[2] See p. 300.

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Mode of application.

In all cases the method of administration is the same. The leaves, all of which must be of one of the three kinds mentioned, are broken up and placed in a basin made out of a number of umbrella-palm leaves, into which water is also poured and a red-hot stone put in to heat it. The leafy basin is then folded up for a short time, during which the water draws out the juices from the leaves. In folding up the basin the leaves forming it are so manipulated that a kind of spout is left, by means of which the infusion is then poured over the wound, after which the packet is opened and placed beneath the wound so that the steam rising from it shall continue to play around and soothe it.[1] As each packet is opened, the tutor addresses the novice and, pointing at the leaf from which the infusion has been made, says, "You see this leaf. You used to call it (e.g.) *rŏmbi*. Well, its real name is *mov-ghat* (the name of a fish). Now you know." The novice dutifully repeats the mock name, and duly pays for the esoteric knowledge with the customary fee of a plaited belt or other small object.

For three days the novices may not drink, nor for four days may they eat puddings.

For the first three days after the operation the novices may not drink water, since the passing of water is both painful and necessitates the too frequent removal of the dressings; nor may they for four days eat puddings, which are considered too rich, but are fed chiefly on roast white yams.[2]

The prohibition against drinking water may also have a ritual significance. It is specifically mentioned in connexion with initiation in all districts, and a similar prohibition is a feature of ritual abstinence on many other occasions, as in gong-making.[3]

To what extent the restrictions on food also, eminently sound as they appear from our point of view, can be said to be based on medical grounds is doubtful, since their application is in all cases ritualised, and as such is regarded by the natives as part of the system of ordeals that the novices have to endure. Thus ritual demands that the restrictions begin and end for all novices at once, irrespective of their individual physical condition.

The raising of the restrictions follows the usual initiatory pattern in that (*a*) a farcical homily is addressed to the novice and (*b*) the novice must pay.

Third Day

Removal of restriction on drinking water. Mock name for water.

The ban on the drinking of water is brought to a close on the evening of the third day, when one of the initiates brings a bambooful of water

[1] Equivalent to a hot fomentation, producing hyperaemia.
[2] The word for roasting is *tun-tun* (Atchin *tu-tun*). [3] See p. 355.

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Sixth Day

Novices bathe for first time in sea, after being hoaxed with the threat of a second operation.

The hoax called "Catching rails," the first eating of pudding, the first washing and the cessation of all-night dancing on the fifth night mark the end, not only of the period of the novice's most intensive trials, but also of the more rigorous aspects of his seclusion. For on the sixth day the novices are taken out of the house and led by their tutors down to the sea to bathe. This act is called *sumbulan va ru*, "going down for the second time," this too being made the occasion for a minor hoax, the wretched novices being led to believe that they are about to undergo a second operation. For at a certain spot on the road down to the shore a single initiate is stationed, bearing in his hand a bamboo knife smeared with the juice of a red fruit called *rori*, representing blood. As the first novice, accompanied by his tutor, comes up to him, this man catches hold of him, saying, "Come on. I'm going to slit the other side of your foreskin now." The poor novice is dismayed and with piteous protests tries to escape. But his fear does not last long, for, after enjoying his fright for a little while, the tutor laughs and says, "It's all right, he's not going to do anything. He's only making fun of you." But the first novice is now used as fresh witness to the truth of the threat, for he is then made to shout out to the next novice behind him telling him that they are all going to have the other side of their foreskins cut. Each novice in turn is thus momentarily terrorised. But it is soon over, and they are all then led down to the sea to bathe.

A new remedy administered, first by the tutors and on subsequent occasions by the novices themselves.

This bathing, besides being a ritual act as well as a pleasant release for the novices, is also made use of for the application of a new remedy, the tutors rubbing the young shoots of plants called *vūnu* and *ro-rori* (the same as that the red juice of which the initiate has just been using to represent blood) between their hands and dipping them in the sea-water until they are soft, and then smearing the juice extracted from them on the novices' wounds. These leaves, and the cure they represent, are called by the mock-esoteric name *nu mbar* "ripe (i.e. dry) coconut," which the novice must learn before paying his fee. This is the last cure to be administered by the tutors. From now on the novices are allowed to bathe whenever they like, and each henceforth, when bathing, administers the same cure upon himself till the wound is quite healed.